

EPA eyes cleanup of Chemetco

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By SANFORD J. SCHMIDT The Telegraph thetelegraph.com

HARTFORD — The U.S. EPA will hold a public meeting next week to discuss a plan to clean up an ugly, black slag heap at the former site of the notorious Chemetco copper smelting plant.

“This is absolutely good news,” said the on-site project coordinator, Kevin Turner of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The meeting is at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 6 at the Hartford Community Center, 715 N. Delmar Ave. The meeting will address a newly filed, federal decree regarding cleanup of what is now referred to as the Chemetco Superfund Site.

The plant along Illinois Route 3 at New Poag Road closed, and the company filed for bankruptcy, about 12 years ago. The result was a Chemetco estate under the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. A lawyer, known as a trustee, has been acting on behalf of the estate.

The federal and state governments agreed to a proposed consent decree with the Chemetco bankruptcy trustee and its work contractor, Paradigm Minerals and Environmental Services.

The U.S. Department of Justice posted a public notice that said the proposed consent decree is a result of the federal and state government suits against Chemetco.

The Justice Department said the proposed decree was filed in federal court on July 18. The decree would regulate the sale and reprocessing of slag and other metal-bearing materials at the Chemetco site. The work would decrease the volume of material that needs to be contained or remediated as a waste; therefore, reducing the potential site of any final remedy, the Justice notice states.

According to its website, Paradigm was founded in 2009 and has developed new, cost-effective and environmentally safe methods of recycling old slag heaps which contain usable minerals.

The consent decree will allow the firm to start retrieving the waste material and recycle it.

The agreement stems from a demonstration project initiated years ago by the trustee in Bankruptcy Court. The agreement calls for Paradigm Minerals and Environmental Services, to perform the work.

A U.S. EPA website says Paradigm is a potential purchaser of the site and was involved in negotiating the consent decree to implement future work and resolve past civil claims against Chemetco.

Turner said the work will be done with oversight by his agency and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. The U.S. EPA has certain authority over the slag heap because it is a huge environmental hazard.

Turner said the state and federal agencies will monitor the work of Paradigm to ensure no further pollution occurs. However, the company has the right to keep certain of its operations confidential, as long as it does not affect the environment.

The Chemetco site was placed on the EPA's National Priorities List in March 2010.

Chemetco was one of the largest copper smelters in the country from 1970 to 2001, when the Illinois EPA discovered a secret pipeline discharging dangerous chemicals into the nearby watershed known as Long Lake, which empties into the Mississippi River.

Chemetco was required to clean up the area, but in the process, layers of zinc oxide were found to a depth of six feet in Long Lake.

The estate of Chemtco fenced the 41 acres on which the plant operated. Some of the large, unsightly metal buildings left by the company have been demolished, and more than 3,000 tons of material associated with the former buildings has been removed from the site for recycling, reclamation or proper disposal.

More than 26,000 gallons of oil and other liquids and 1,100 tons of waste have been removed.

The foundry building had housed the smelting furnaces and was the largest building on the site.

The old American Air Filter system area and the bag-house structures were also demolished.

"The bankruptcy trustee also executed asset sales that significantly reduced the presence of more than 11,000 tons and 4,000 gallons of potentially contaminated source material," the U.S. EPA states.

On April 21, 1999, a federal grand jury indicted the company's former owner and CEO, Denis L. Feron, and five of his employees with violating the United States Clean Water Act.

Despite regular monitoring of Chemetco by EPA officials, Feron ordered the construction of a secret pipe through which he authorized the pumping of millions of gallons of water containing heavy metals and other hazardous waste into Long Lake and nearby wetlands. Environmental inspectors discovered the pipe in 1996.

The company was ordered to pay a \$3.86 million fine and filed bankruptcy in November 2001.

Feron fled in 2008 and was on the EPAs "most wanted list." In 2010, Feron struck a deal and paid \$500,000 in restitution, and all charges were dropped.

Some of the funds from recycling the materials at the site may go to creditors in the bankruptcy case. However, the company left many large creditors

Commerce Bank was listed as one of the large secured creditors, claiming \$7.8 million in the bankruptcy case.

IEPA asked to toughen Waukegan coal plant permit

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<http://www.bnd.com/2013/08/01/2722818/iepa-asked-to-toughen-waukegan.html#storylink=cpy>

The Associated Press CHICAGO — Environmentalists are asking the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to toughen a water-discharge permit proposed for a coal-fired power plant in Waukegan. They say a draft permit for Midwest Generation's plant fails to adequately investigate whether Lake Michigan will be harmed by waste water discharged by the plant. A 30-day public comment period began with a hearing on Wednesday night. The permit issued under a federal program limits the temperature of water and pollutants that can be discharged into the lake after cycling through the plant and ash ponds. But critics say it doesn't go far enough to ensure fish and water quality won't be harmed. The IEPA says there is no indication there's too much pollution or heat being discharged, though thermal tests will be conducted in coming years.

By KAYLA HEIMERMAN kheimerman@saukvalley.com 800-798-4085, ext. 535

Here's the poop on the pigpen

Farmer pens up piggies to fertilize his field; chickens on the horizon

http://www.saukvalley.com/2013/08/01/heres-the-poop-on-the-pigpen/aprh5uo/?_xsl=/print.xsl

STERLING — This little piggy went to market. This little piggy stayed home.

And then there are these little piggies that set up shop on a precarious plot of land — a fallow field — just outside the Sterling city limits, near a movie theater, a gas station and a chain restaurant.

Farmer Norm Koster, 62, owns the 120-acre parcel that abuts city limits on Polo Road, near Applebee's, Kelly's Market and Mobil and Carmike Sauk Valley 8 Cinema. He's had the land for more than 30 years and raised commercial corn and soybeans. He now has the remnants of a wheat crop, with clover and alfalfa mixed in.

The pigs are just hired help, in a way.

Koster bought the pigs — at least a few hundred of varying breeds, all about a few months old and about 50 pounds — in a lot and deployed them on his field about midnight Wednesday.

He plans to move them from one 96-by-96-foot pen to another every 2 days across the entire 120 acres. Their job? To naturally fertilize the land.

"This is the first year I've applied no chemicals, no commercial fertilizer," Koster said. "This way, I think, is better for the soil, better for these pigs, and [for the meat that reaches the market] better for the people.

"It's kind of back to the way it used to be done."

The pen is fenced in and provides the pigs their basic needs — food, water and shelter (a shaded area to escape the sun and to curl up in hay). They graze on the remnants of wheat, clover and alfalfa — and the occasional turnip — and simultaneously deposit the richest fertilizer onto the soil.

The noise is low — the gentle hum of oinks, snorts and sneezes can be heard as they snuffle and clamber over each other to get to the water or the food. And the smell is tolerable, perhaps more so than that of the small, not-well-ventilated barns at the county fair.

Koster estimates that the pigs – including a second lot set to arrive in a week – will have the field fertilized by November. He plans to till the soil and plant a cover crop, such as wheat or rye, for the winter, then plant corn in the spring.

Koster will add hundreds of chickens (working simultaneously in their own pen on a similar rotating basis) to the mix by the end of the month.

The pigs, which should top out at 280 pounds at the end of the process, will be sold at market and should fetch a good price; people are willing to pay good money for pork raised in this fashion, Koster said.

The eggs laid by the chickens also will be sold – right on the spot along Polo Road – and also should fetch a good price, coming from cage-free, range-fed fowl.

The operation, PEEP Inc. – for Pasture, Eggs en Pork – has drawn the ire of some folks.

"I've had some pretty p----- off customers," Applebee's general manager Jason Zelle said.

The city has fielded a few calls from people convinced the pigs and the land are within city limits. The Whiteside County Health Department has received several complaints, too.

Neither agency has jurisdiction over the pig pen.

"It's zoned agricultural," said Gene Johnston, environmental health director for the health department. "We don't investigate farm-related complaints. We do not have any authority to put any regulations on them."

Farm operations are regulated by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and, in some cases, by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Applebee's management hasn't done anything about the nuisance, Zelle said. Customers have asked and complained about the pig pen – mostly the smell – but generally have stayed for a meal, he said.

Koster maintains he isn't doing anything wrong. In fact, he welcomes passersby and curious onlookers – even those with their noses turned up – to stop by so he can educate them about his practices, he said.

In fact, a mother and her three daughters were out petting the pigs Thursday afternoon. The girls giggled as the little pigs nosed at their knees and then scurried about the pen.

Koster, accompanied by his youngest daughter, beamed.

"This is the way it's supposed to be," he said.

EPA records reveal oil refinery safety questions

<http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/iteam&id=9193020>

Thursday, August 01, 2013

August 1, 2013 (JOLIET, Ill.) (WLS) -- A history of incidents at a major southwest suburban oil refinery has led to legal action and the I-Team has discovered additional public safety questions.

After a recent release of a potentially dangerous chemical into the atmosphere, the I-Team has learned that state officials are trying to crack down on ExxonMobil's refinery near Joliet.

But there's a larger cloud of doubt that has been uncovered and some local residents say they are questioning their family's safety.

"Horrible. Babies, your kids, animals, and then they don't know about it?" said Allison Stipanovich.

It's the unknown that has Stipanovich worried. She lives near the ExxonMobil Refinery, or in the case of what happened this past October, within raining distance. That's when an oily mist from the plant fell onto surrounding towns and neighborhoods without warning, even shutting down i-55.

Now Stipanovich says she's worried about a chemical release from the plant this spring that went undetected for nine hours.

"It's scary, because you don't know what that could lead to," she said. "Should you live around here? Should you move if they're not aware of those things? They need to get it under control to make sure that this doesn't happen."

The most recent incident at the plant is leading to legal action. The state attorney general and will county prosecutors filed this lawsuit charging air pollution violations by ExxonMobil.

According to emergency reports the company filed with the state, a "valve failure" that went undetected for nine hours in March, led to an airborne release of more than four thousand pounds of the potentially dangerous chemical hydrogen sulfide.

"It can be very dangerous," said Dr. Samuel Dorevitch. "Given that there have been high level releases, if I lived in that community I would want to know what the community level exposure has been."

The I-Team's inspection of United States Environmental Protection Agency records reveals additional potential threats to public health and safety.

First, according to the U.S. EPA, ExxonMobil allegedly violated three different environmental laws at Channahon from 2008 through 2011, including improper handling of hazardous waste and failing to provide immediate public notice of releases to the environment.

Second, the facility has filed 64 hazardous materials incident reports since 2010 for releasing potentially dangerous chemicals in excess of legal limits.

Finally, in a federal filing a month ago, ExxonMobil said its Channahon plant reached daily levels of hydrogen sulfide release in 2012 that were so high that they had to notify the EPA. An ExxonMobil statement says that the emissions are consistent with industry standards.

ExxonMobil wouldn't provide an on camera response for this report and their security guards tried to stop us from shooting video of the plant.

In a statement, the company says it's "committed to environmental performance excellence" and their goal is to have no environmental incidents.

"What's most surprising is that a leak like this can go for nine hours without being detected this is frightening," said Ellen Rendulich, Citizens Against Ruining the Environment.

Southwest suburban environmental activists say this incident is just their latest concern with facilities throughout the Chicago area.

"This is an all-encompassing problem," said Carol Stark, Citizens Against Ruining the Environment. "It's not just a localized problem because air doesn't have a boundary."

As for that October oil storm? An ExxonMobil spokeswoman said the company responded quickly to the incident and regrets any inconvenience to their neighbors.

ExxonMobil reports their facility has been recently inspected by Illinois and U.S. EPA with no violations noted and that they comply with all permits, rules and regulations.